

BEYOND THE BELL

The NSW Judges Journal

WELCOME!

Welcome to the second edition of the NSW Judges Journal, Beyond the Bell. It's hard to believe it's just over 3 months since our first edition, time flies with so many events, be they dressage competitions or extreme weather events. A big shout out to everyone affected by recent extreme weather events, we are thinking of you and the recovery ahead.

Thank you to my contributors this quarter and the great suggestions for different articles. Please keep them coming!

Starting with the next edition, it would be great to include some photos from 'around the arenas' at events. PLEASE email me photos of you and others at events, they can be as sensible or silly as you like!

I welcome any feedback, ideas for topics you'd like addressed or stories to share, please contact me via email at mjdoyle034@gmail.com or on 0414 991599.

Happy Judging, Mel.

OVER THE PAGE

In this edition, we'll:

- Get an update on JSC news;
- see who's moving through the ranks;
- thank those wonderful judges who are hanging up their bell;
- hear from Sue Scaysbrook and Jobina Kennedy in the first edition of our Through the Paces series;
- chat with Karen Sutcliffe about tackling online theory exams;
- remind ourselves where to find Engage and EA training opportunity links; and
- report on upcoming events for potential sit-in and shadow opportunities.

The NSW Judges Sub-Committee News

CDI Workshop

The NSW Judges Sub-Committee (JSC) ran a very successful workshop with FEI 5* judge Clive Halsall from the UK on Sunday 4 May 2025. Through the use of headsets, attendees were able to listen to live scoring and commentary on test movements by the demo riders, giving everyone a chance to test themselves against our presenter.

We welcomed 97 attendees to the seminar, with 54 being dressage officials, a 40% increase in NSW judges able to attend compared to 2024. It was a great opportunity to have so many judges together in a relaxed atmosphere.



Reaccreditation

The dreaded re-accreditation period came around again and we found ourselves tackling the online ORBT exam and searching through records for judging and seminar/workshop records. Almost everyone has managed to complete this process. If you still haven't managed to complete the process or are concerned about what to do if you have something missing, please contact Julie Jones (tennysondale@bigpond.com) as soon as possible.

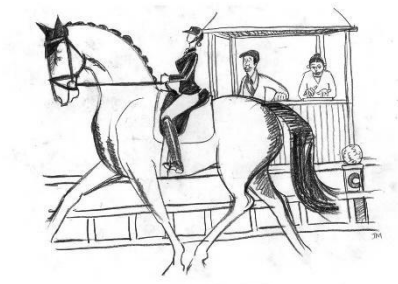
Manning Valley Dressage Association Seminar

A successful G/F/E seminar was run at a private facility outside Taree on 27 April 2025 following G/F and E zoom theory sessions run the week before. It was great to see 14 participants at the seminar and some new faces keen to start their judging journey.

CONGRATS TO RECENT UPGRADES!

Congratulations to Jillian Green for upgrading to F Level recently!

We have a lot of judges working through upgrades to the next level at the moment and will no doubt see more taking their practical exams as State and National dressage championships are held.



THANK YOU TO RECENT RETIREES

A massive thank you for the years of service provided by our recently retired judges. We're very sad to see you hang up your bell but thank you so much for the words of wisdom to those coming through the ranks and your endless feedback to those competing in our sport.



2025 Retirees include:

Iris Greer
Carol Anderson
Kimberly Davis

VALE LIZ PUGH

Very sadly, passionate regional dressage judge Liz Pugh passed away in April 2025. She was a very big supporter of dressage and carriage driving and was a great supporter of ACT Dressage Association, National Capital Equestrian Club and Young Dressage Association. We send condolences to her family and friends.



THROUGH THE PACES - WALK

by Sue Scaysbrook & Jobina Kennedy

Over the next three volumes of Beyond the Bell, we're going to start at the beginning and explore the paces. The good qualities, faults, corresponding marks and comments we can provide to help and encourage riders. In this volume we explore what some will consider the most important pace of all, the walk.

THE WALK AND ITS VARIATIONS

The walk is a marching pace in a regular and well-marked four-time beat with equal intervals between each beat in the sequence of left hind, left fore, right hind, right fore. There is no moment of suspension and therefore the word "impulsion" is never used when describing a walk, rather the term "activity" is more appropriate. Within the levels of Dressage tests, there are four recognised walks – Free Walk, Medium Walk, Collected Walk and Extended Walk. Walk variations should be distinct and show a clear difference in overtrack and overall attitude in the horse's posture.



What could possibly go wrong – TENSION, the enemy of a good walk! The walk must always remain free from mental or physical tension and show clear rhythm, regularity and freedom.

The walk has often been labelled as the pace where training imperfections are most evident. The walk becomes vulnerable to impurities as it has no moment of suspension. A walk can be adversely affected if the horse is asked to walk "on the bit" at an early stage of its training or by being asked to collect too early in the walk.

The rider runs the risk of deteriorating the purity of the rhythm in all variations of the walk with the walk becoming ambling or at worst a lateral motion when the foreleg and the hind leg on the same side move on the same beat creating a 2-beat rhythm rather than the correct 4 beat.

The Free Walk in Preliminary, Novice and Elementary Levels, offers the horse the opportunity to fully relax through complete freedom to lower the head and neck and stretch over the top line from a light, lengthened rein to the bit. The number one priority always is the rhythm with a marching, active tempo. When the horse becomes tense and loses confidence, perhaps due to its surroundings, the back will tighten, preventing the hind legs from swinging well under the body and showing a clear three- hoof overtrack. The suppleness and reach through the shoulders will be impaired and the horse may lose rhythm altogether and jog resulting in an insufficient mark or below.



The Medium Walk is shown from Preliminary through to Medium Level and must be rhythmical and unconstrained. The horse remains “on the bit” with the nose slightly in front of the vertical, poll the highest point and shows even and determined steps. The overtrack is less than the Free Walk with the hind feet touching the ground approximately 2 prints in front of the prints of the fore feet showing a moderate length of stride. This walk is the first step in bringing the horse into a heightened self-carriage and frame from a completely free

movement and this transition needs to show the willingness and understanding between horse and rider – the harmonious connection in the training where the horse accepts the light contact whilst walking through its whole body. The Medium Walk needs to show a difference in the horse’s physical demeanor with the horse being confident to then move on to the trot sequence without tightening through the back, losing suppleness and straightness.

The Collected Walk appears from Advanced Level through to Grand Prix. This walk shows the higher level of training and balance where the horse steps resolutely forward with his neck raised and arched in a proud manner while remaining “on the bit” with the nose approaching the vertical and showing a greater degree of engagement. The horse shows a positive self-carriage through an increased carrying power, always rhythmical and regular and a confident acceptance of the bit. The joints are more articulated emanating from a soft back showing more



elevated, shorter steps of greater activity than in the Medium Walk. The hind feet prints should step into the prints of the forefeet. This variation of the walk, in particular, can show difficulties in the training where the steps lose the clarity of the pure rhythm. Anticipation can also disturb the flow of this walk resulting in a loss of co-ordination and regularity. In an effort to “hide” a faulty Collected Walk, the rider may choose to ride a quicker tempo but this does not help the situation!

The Extended Walk also comes into play from Medium Level through to Grand Prix. This powerful walk allows the horse to cover the ground as much as possible, showing freedom and reach through the shoulders and the utmost overtrack. The control of the poll is very important while the head



and neck show extension to the bit. The horse's mouth should reach to the point of the horse's shoulder. When the horse moves through its whole body, the walk has an almost cat-like “prowling” attitude as the rider ekes out the last little bit of overstep and striding the horse has to offer. It can be one of the most appealing variations of the walk to see. So important is the Extended Walk it is given a co-efficient of 2 which in a Grand Prix test is worth more than a line of 9 flying changes every second stride and is equally weighted to a line of 15 one-tempi changes! The rhythm and stride is supported by the overall suppleness of the horse which in turn will help to maintain the straightness in the Extended Walk and in the transition back to Collected Walk.

The transitions within these variations are critical to the presentation of the different walks and the horse must remain accepting of the rider's aids throughout showing clarity from one walk variation to the next – a seamless, fluid approach.

Some points to consider when judging the walk bearing in mind that all criteria of the Training Scale are important reference for marking:

- If the horse clearly loses Rhythm (first criteria of the Training Scale) and the walk becomes lateral the mark must be Insufficient (4), however, if this break in rhythm is only momentary and the rest of the diagonal is fluid and active, then a Sufficient/Marginal mark (5.0 or 5.5) can be awarded. Whilst the rider would be painfully aware of the loss of rhythm, judges should clarify their mark by a comment such as “unfortunate loss of balance and rhythm” or “momentary loss of rhythm but quickly rebalanced”.

- As we've mentioned, Suppleness (second criteria on the Training Scale) is required to promote the swing through the whole body in the Free and Extended Walks. We sometimes see a lack of suppleness appearing as a tight (but regular), somewhat restricted walk so we are then in the area of a Satisfactory mark (6.0 or 6.5) with the comment, as an example, "more suppleness over the back to be developed for more fluent strides" or "more relaxation and reach through shoulders; develop overtrack". But when we see an energetic, engaged, supple Free or Extended Walk accepting a comfortable contact then we can be confidently in the area of a Very Good to Excellent mark (9.0 to 10) with an encouraging comment such as:

"impressive overtrack and relaxation; walking through whole body" or "regular, covering ground, very supple, seeking the bit".

A correct 4-beat rhythm and relaxation must always be the priority in the assessment of each variation of walk.



- Contact (third criteria on the Training Scale) in the walk it is very important that the rider maintains a very light, steady contact and allows the natural movement of the head and neck. If we see resistance to the contact, open mouth, shaking the head, coming off the bit, dropping the poll and coming behind the vertical, our marks need to reflect this.

Depending on the severity of the resistance, and taking into consideration the other criteria of the training scale our mark could be between a Sufficient/Marginal to Satisfactory (5.0 to 6.0) with a comment of "resistance, disturbing suppleness over back" or "needing more acceptance of the bit ", "more secure contact" or "coming too deep and dropping poll".

- Collection (sixth and Final criteria on the Training Scale) is developed from Elementary Level and as such the degree of Collection builds leading up to Grand Prix Level Collection. The steps in a collected walk need to show a clear difference from a Medium or Extended walk, in regards to the degree of ground cover, overtrack and outline. If we cannot see this clarity, albeit rhythmical, then our mark would need to be in the area of Satisfactory (6.0) with a comment of “develop more clarity in Transition” or “show more defined self-carriage and heightened steps”.
- When the horse is showing clear rhythm, is quite supple and relaxed and confident in the contact (no matter what the walk variant) but may need just a little more Activity (Fourth criteria on the Training Scale replacing “impulsion”) which can often be the case if the rider is a little cautious, it is still reasonable to reward the walk with a Fairly Good mark (7.0 to 7.5) – there are, after all, another 5 marks to be had for a really impressive Free, Medium, Collected or Extended walk.



For full information on the Walk and how to judge it, go to the FEI Dressage Handbook – Guidelines for Judging.

Next time in Beyond the Bell, we look at the Trot pace.

Cheers, Sue Scaysbrook

National A Level and Young Horse Judge and Mentor

A special thanks goes to Rodney's Photography for sponsoring local photos for our Through the Paces series!

A black rectangular box containing the text 'Rodney's Photography' in a white, elegant cursive script.

Theory exams online a chat with Karen Sutcliffe

While most of us only recently started to feel comfortable judging using tablets, some of our colleagues stepped into uncharted waters and took on the new optional online theory exams for their recent upgrades with success. We had a chat to Karen Sutcliffe, a regional judge, who recently completed an online exam and who shared these insights.

The convenience speaks for itself. Judges located in regional or remote locations can jump on and do the theory exam from the comfort of their own home. No need to incur petrol and other vehicle costs, no complications of sourcing an exam invigilator to oversee the exam process.



The exam is done via an online app and you receive your exam via email. Your computer needs to have a camera and audio (as it does for Zoom meetings) but otherwise doesn't require anything fancy. Karen did hers using an ASUS laptop.

Reasonable internet is required. Nothing fancy but something that's fairly reliable. Karen had unlimited NBN satellite internet via Activ8 (not Starlink).

You can speak to the camera if something goes wrong. The only catch is that it doesn't talk back, so it seems the best you can do is provide it as much information as possible if you have a computer or other problem during the exam process.

Typing skills are an obvious asset in choosing to do the exam this way. Diagrams are not something that you can do in the online exam. So, where parenthesis and arrows might be handy in linking ideas or concepts such as with the training scale, this option is not currently available in the online version. Karen suggested the best option might be to develop some bullet points or short sentences to address these sorts of questions. Another advantage over the paper exam is that the boxes expand to allow as much space as you need to answer the question.

Currently, exam questions appear one at a time (as they do in the ORBT) so you would need to be mindful of how many marks each question is worth and how much time you can afford to spend per mark. There is no "reading time" to formulate an exam plan, nor the opportunity to attack the questions that you might find easier first. Having said that, this might be something that the online exam formulators can work on.

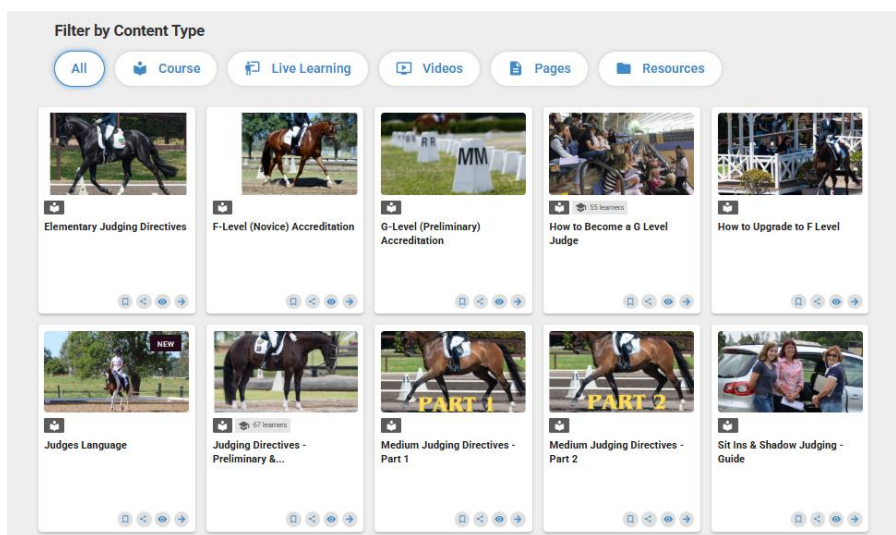
As Karen says, the option of not having to go anywhere to do these exams, is a great step forward for the upgrading process. Paper exams remain available. The online exam is merely an option for those who might find it a more convenient way to complete the exam.

What's happening on ENGAGE

After a busy start to the year, the team have been focusing more on integrity of the information on Engage rather than adding new material. If you haven't already, don't forget to take a look at the new Course titled "Judges Language" which includes tips and tricks to develop your judging vocabulary. This can be particularly handy if you're currently working through an upgrade.

You will find this course in the Catalogue:

<https://officialstraining.ensw.org.au/catalogue>



Don't forget, if you've never logged into Engage before, you'll need a New User activation email. Contact admin@dressagensw.com.au and Mary will assist you. If you have logged in before but need to reset your password you can do this from the login page.

Here is the login page for Engage LMS:

<https://officialstraining.ensw.org.au>

If you'd like to revisit the Workshop with Jane Ventura on Judges Language a replay of the Zoom session is available to view on the DNSW website:

<https://www.dressagensw.equestrian.org.au/content/educational-videos>

Training link available on EA website!

Now that we know there's a national calendar for dressage judge education on the EA website we thought we'd keep the link here so you can find it easily!

[NATIONAL CALENDAR OF DRESSAGE SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS/PRACTICAL EXAMS](#)

You can find it under the Education tab on the EA home page, then under the I AM AN OFFICIAL heading, choose Course Calendar and then scroll down to near the bottom of the page and dressage has its own button to take you through to the above calendar.

Upcoming events and potential sit-in and shadow opportunities

After a busy 3 months of events in Autumn, our upcoming events and upgrade opportunities keep coming. NSW State Championships at Tamworth 14-17 August 2025 will afford practical exam opportunities for some and we wish everyone taking these on, the very best of luck.



Young dressage club missed out on running their championship event in April due to a supplier fail on stabling. However, the amazing committee still managed to push on and hold a "pop-up event" with judges and stewards (pictured left) already booked, allowing shadows and sit-ins to continue. Great news is that Young are holding their actual Championships in October.

Possibly another opportunity for sit-ins and Shadows!

Hawkesbury Dressage Festival ran from 14-22 June 2025 and kindly afforded many sit-in and shadow judging opportunities. 21 shadow judgments took place and 4 sit-ins. A big thank you

to our tireless Guru of producing event results, Karen Lever, for having candidates scoring available for mentor judges to complete shadow reviews.

Our next Seminar is set to be held in Grafton, so mark your diaries now!

We are looking at the possibility of holding one last seminar for the year at a southern location subject to interest. More on this next edition.

A blue-themed poster for a Judges Seminar. The title 'JUDGES SEMINAR' is in large white letters, with 'GRAFTON 2025' in gold below it. Underneath is 'G, F & E Levels' in white. The schedule is listed: 'G&F Level Theory: Tuesday 2 September', 'E Level Theory: Wednesday, 3 September', and 'Practical Sessions: Saturday 6 September'. At the bottom are three circular images: a rider on a white horse, a rider on a dark horse, and a rider on a dark horse jumping a fence.

JUDGES SEMINAR

GRAFTON 2025

G, F & E Levels

G&F Level Theory: Tuesday 2 September
E Level Theory: Wednesday, 3 September
Practical Sessions: Saturday 6 September

